



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers



NFFE News Release

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Union Condemns Wrongful Indictment of Federal Wildland Firefighter

Washington, D.C. – Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) strongly condemns the wrongful indictment of Rick Snodgrass, a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wildland firefighter who was working as an active “burn boss” when taken into sheriff’s custody on October 19, 2022. At the time of his arrest, Firefighter Snodgrass, an Assistant Fire Management Officer, was working as the incident commander overseeing fire operations and containment efforts during a prescribed burn on the Malheur National Forest in Grant County, Oregon.

Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley arrested Firefighter Snodgrass during the active burn operation after the fire unexpectedly jumped a roadway when wind suddenly picked up, causing the fire to burn several acres of grasslands on private property. While the U.S. Forest Service operates a program that offers reimbursement to private landowners in the rare event a burn escapes containment, the Grant County Sheriff’s office chose instead to arrest Snodgrass during the fire incident that he was commanding. To add insult to injury, on February 2, 2024, the case was presented to a local grand jury that returned an indictment against Snodgrass for reckless burning, a class A misdemeanor.

NFFE National President Randy Erwin released the following statement following the indictment of Firefighter Snodgrass:

“It is unconscionable that a local sheriff would arrest a working wildland firefighter during an active fire operation. Not only did the sheriff break the law when he detained Firefighter Snodgrass, but in doing so, the sheriff put his own community in danger by apprehending a working fire commander during a dangerous incident. Firefighter Snodgrass was arrested, and has now been indicted, for simply doing his job. The only reckless action taken during this prescribed burn was the Sheriff intentionally obstructing Firefighter Snodgrass in the performance of a necessary government operation.”

“Prescribed burns are essential to keeping communities across this country safe from wildfires. Over 99 percent of prescribed burns go according to plan, but when dealing with unpredictable environmental conditions, there is always a small risk that a prescribed burn could spill over into an untargeted area. Normally when this happens, the agency will address any damages to affected parties as appropriate. What is not normal is for a local sheriff to arrest a working fire commander during an incident. This unlawful action and subsequent indictment have set a dangerous precedent that only serves to continue the increasing threats and attacks on federal employees simply performing their duties in service to the American public.

“Firefighter Snodgrass will continue to have the full, unconditional support of this union, as does every federal wildland firefighter and civil servant across this country. We are confident that Firefighter Snodgrass acted in a lawful and appropriate manner in leading an approved prescribed fire. We continue to affirm that there must be consequences for this unprecedented abuse of power and incredibly dangerous disruption to the critical work of the Forest Service. NFFE applauds the Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service, and the Department of Justice for expressing their full support of Firefighter Snodgrass in the performance of his official duties.”

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Established in 1917, the National Federation of Federal Employees is America’s first union representing civil service federal employees. NFFE represents approximately 110,000 federal employees in 35 departments and agencies government-wide, including 20,000 at the U.S. Forest Service. NFFE is affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO. For more information, go to www.nffe.org